

Unitarians and Missions

It came as a great surprise the other day to read the account of the first Unitarian Missionary Conference, which was held in Boston. A certain wing of Unitarians are strongly in favour of Missions, and the first day was devoted to the hearing of representatives of other denominations. We cannot help expressing our surprise and regret that a member of our own Communion, although now engaged in scholastic work in Holland, was one of the speakers. It was interesting to find an address by a leading American Unitarian on "Why must Unitarians now change their Attitude towards Foreign Missionary Work?" But it must be confessed that the address of the President of the Unitarian Association was not very encouraging, for he said that Unitarians have no interest whatever in the old idea of carrying the Gospel to the heathen; that they did not sympathize with the motives behind the traditional appeal for foreign missions; that they did not care to invite people out of one superstition into another, and that the heathen have much to tell us. It was a curious introduction to a Missionary Conference to give an address without the slightest favourable reference to the Bible, or to the Gospel, or to the Person of Jesus Christ, and although this chilling impression was relieved by the words of another speaker, yet there can be very little doubt that the definite and direct influence of Unitarianism on Foreign Missions will continue to be as small as it has been in the past. After all, it is the message of Redeeming Love in a Divine Saviour that constitutes the power of God to salvation, and for this work Unitarianism is utterly useless.

Excuses Up-to-date

Two well-known preachers have just been speaking with power on this solemn subject. It was pointed out that to-day men say:

I am tired; I pray thee have me excused.

I have bought a new automobile, and must needs go and try it.

I have married a wife who has Sunday evening parties.

And the significance of the parable lay in these things: (1) That the excuses stated by Christ were legitimate preoccupations, and (2) the excuses were accepted. The banquet will be spread and furnished with guests, for God's purposes cannot be annulled, but those originally invited will not be there; the invitation will not be repeated; the excuse will have availed. Thus Scripture is seen to apply to modern life and carry its own searching message.

Does Man Need a Mediator?

This is a question which has special point at Christmastide. That man is the offspring of God, Scripture affirms (Acts xvii. 28). Adam's origin was from God, and through him we have all derived our being from the Creator. Man is, therefore, above the beasts. He has received a spirit which is deathless. When God breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life he became a living soul. Man was made in the image and after the likeness of God. But, looking back through the vista of the past and surveying men as they are to-day, can we say that they bear the likeness of their Creator? Have they the moral qualities that belong to the God whom the Scriptures reveal:

holiness and love? Is not the evidence of a fall everywhere apparent? Are the villainy and vice that are rampant on all sides marks of the likeness of God? Do we trace the resemblance of Him whose nature is love in jealousies and strifes, greed in business, tyranny of parents over children, disobedience of children to parents, tumults and wars, conflicts between masters and men? The New Testament Scripture is the warrant of the Christian faith. What does it teach concerning man's state and the manner of his approach to God? It clearly sets forth the fact that Christ was sent of the Father to win men back to God, but that men did not receive His testimony. "He came unto His own and His own received Him not, but to as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God." Nothing declares man's ruin and wickedness like his rejection of Christ. The few who received Him had to undergo an inward revolution which Scripture calls new birth that they might receive the Sent One of the Father. Why did His own not receive Him when He came? Their own prophets, read in the synagogues every Sabbath day, had foretold His coming. Though David's Lord, He was born of David's seed according to the flesh. As man, David's offspring; as God, He was David's root. No family on earth in that day had greater light than had Israel. No nation was brought into such nearness to God. They had the Divine oracles. Yet, with all their light they proved themselves utterly blind to the grace of Him who had come down amongst them. "Away with Him!" was their cry. Where are His rejecters and crucifiers to-day? Scattered, beaten down, trampled upon by every nation for nineteen centuries! Had He not been previously heralded by John the Baptist, whom all men counted a prophet? Had not the Father's voice been heard proclaiming Him as His beloved Son in whom He was well pleased? Did not these testimonies show the utter blindness, and aggravate the guilt, of those who rejected Him? If man is not lost, how can we understand the Incarnation and Crucifixion of the Son of God? Who was ever so worthy to live? Did He not bring blessing and untold wealth to His brethren in the flesh; sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb? Did He not give back a dead brother to the heart-broken sisters of Bethany, and an only son to his widowed mother? Ought He not to have received honour for such deeds? Why, then, was He given a cross of infamy and shame? Then, as now, men loved darkness rather than light. Christ was the light of the world. His life exposed the hypocrisy of men under the worst of all covers, that of a religious garb. "He that doeth truth cometh to the light." If all had been God's true children they would have come to the light and heralded it with joy.

What lies at the bottom of all the unbelief in the necessity for the new birth is the denial of the fall of man whereby he has become estranged from God, and put under the power of the devil, the god of this world. Man, having fallen through disobedience, is at enmity against God. This state of mind needs to be changed. "Ye must be born again," said our Lord to a religious ruler of the Jews. Amazed at such a statement, he asked, "How can these things be?" The reply was decisive: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." How crushing to natural pride is this teaching! If two are not of the same mind, how can they be happy together? There must be harmony of mind and will between two parties if their happiness is to be permanent. Man's mind, being

out of harmony with God's, he is not free to approach Him. His state and the sins he has committed make him afraid. Conscience brings back the past, death becomes a terror. If honest, men must confess they have no delight in God. They find more pleasure in the things that are contrary to Him. This in itself is proof that man is born without the nature of God, which is love, and is not in the state of his original creation, when he held sweet converse with his Creator. Nothing proves the fall of man more than the pride that will not admit it. He thinks the doctrine is an insult to the dignity of human nature. But Scripture must be set aside if the truth of the fall be not admitted. "By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin, so that death has passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Rom. v. 12). All, deriving their existence from Adam, are begotten in his likeness, sinful.

The New Testament sets forth the state of man as a ruined creature needing reconciliation to God. Our Lord's teaching, as well as that of His inspired servants, is plain enough. He says, "I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." A lost man is one who is out of relationship with God. Only such did Christ come to seek and die to save. Why do those who deny the need of a Mediator and an Atonement for men extol the virtues of Jesus as Man, and admire the "Sermon on the Mount" if these words of the Son of God are not true? St. Paul likewise testified to the need of a Mediator. Yet, judging from his sincerity and earnest religious character, he needed one least. Blameless in conduct and sincerely religious, he was yet the chief of sinners. Was he not converted by the voice of the very Mediator he once despised? Was not his entire life revolutionized by that mighty voice, the voice of Jesus the crucified, now exalted Lord of all? Nothing but the infinite sacrifice of Calvary could meet the just claims of the Throne, nor express the pent-up compassion of God's heart for sinners. God could not wink at sin, nor pass it by as of no account. That we might escape the judgment due to our sins and be brought to God, He gave His own Son. So fully has the way back to Him been opened that we have "boldness to enter into the holiest by the Blood of Jesus." (Heb. x. 19). The veil that hindered man's approach to God is now rent; through that infinite sacrifice and in the power of a new life the believer can draw near, not tremblingly, but with the utmost confidence. If God has expressed His love in such a marvellous way, the knowledge of this gives us liberty to draw near to Him. Apart from Atonement this would have been forever impossible. "Without shedding of blood is no remission." (Heb. ix. 22). Everywhere the Apostles went they preached Jesus as the Mediator "delivered for our offences and . . . raised again for our justification." This was the good news that wrought such wonders and turned the world upside down. The Spirit's power accompanied it. How could such a result have been otherwise effected? A few simple fishermen in their own strength could never have brought to pass such a mighty awakening in the world as was witnessed in those days. And the old story of redemption by the blood of Christ still holds the field. Man fallen, a Mediator provided, the believer saved—This is its essence. To this let us cling. As David said of Goliath's sword, so may it be said of this story of redeeming love: "There is none like it!" This is the message of Christmas, Good Friday and the entire Christian year, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."